

## Final Book - Charon and Garnet

I closed my eyes.

To look at someone is to capture them in your eye. It is to insert them into your awareness through the window called the eye. The glass window of this window is so clear in appearance that it seems to allow no distortion, but in truth, it creates a biased sight, which is then taken to heart above everything else.

That is to say, even though I look at it, I must not insert it into my gaze.

If one wills it, one's wish will always lay in their gaze. But as wishes are always far away, we must always maintain distance as well...

As such.

Mang - 望

I saw it.

I decided to no longer care about what it was. Even if it killed what was once the children, even if its original form was the man who made Garnet enter his cocoon, I would not put any emotion into my strike. I will remove it just as I would a block of stone, a hurdle placed along my path.

"....."

I still had my eyes closed, so by my series of deductions, it should have stayed still because it would only have moved if I had looked at it.

However, it didn't. It had moved to somewhere else. Is there still something in this place that can hold that thing in its eyes? There should be no surviving people here, however. So there shouldn't be any gazes.

".....!"

I heard the disordered noise of saw blades and the sound of something solid, like a jewel, shattering into tiny pieces.

Yes, like the jewel Garnet was cocooned in...

'clink'

I heard the sound of what that voice had called an 'egg' being broken apart.

The sounds of that huge crystal cracking and shattering were over in an instant. Only after that did it stop moving, and silence once again descended upon the laboratory.

Garnet had been watching everything. In that opaque and solitary space, he watched the outside, always in a struggle to hatch.

I slowly walked towards it, my eyes shut.

I felt the shaking of the muscles of my closed eyes and sword-gripping hand.

"....."

I took some steps, neither few nor many, until I felt I was standing right in front of it.

Until a while ago, I believed I could cut that thing down without emotion.

If I were to attack with my blood-drenched weapon like that, I would be able to cut it as if only empty air was there.

However...

I adamantly wanted to see its form struggling in pain... And so, I chose to capture it in my gaze.

I opened my eyes.

Soon after, I saw its machinery activate and its opened pupil from the gap in the box.

Immediately, a mechanical arm bearing a saw blade flew in.

Something blunt was needed to catch it. For that sake, I strained my heart to coil the Mang.

The blood cloak, worn with resentment, was sturdier than before, but the indiscriminate gyration of the saw blade forced the blood to shed and burst. But I must bear it. I allowed what little blood I had left to gush out to endure this brutality.



I put my hands on the cold metal box and looked it straight in the eye, hidden deep within.

"What are you looking at that makes you so pleased?"

And before my blood could run out and fall apart...

2 Mang.

Thirst.

The Mang spurred my thirst for the blood I was to spill, so I jabbed my blade deep into the box.

The gazes, the people, the destiny that had until now merely observed the suffering of my life. As if cursing everything in this world, I poured out all the strength I could muster into it. The blade of blood, embedded into its eye, took on a sporadically pointed shape akin to a mass of thorns. This form was not of a sword meant to kill but of a tool that purely inflicted pain.

As if something broke in my head, I ceaselessly thrust the stake-like thorned sword into its eye socket.

I couldn't protect anything, and I may never be able to.

That eye peered as if it could see my whole life, from past to present, drily yet interestedly. It was as if I, who even let Garnet die, the one I could have saved, could only see my own impatience and naïveté beyond that pupil. The box, as if trying to release itself from the agony, shook violently and, at the same time, fiercely pulled down its saw blade in an attempt to cleave me.

My undying rage was directed at this thing that does not pay the price for peering at tragedy only for pleasure. Are the fruits of what I experienced in the dots only ripening now? No, this wrath is towards myself, for having forgotten about Garnet even though I surpassed those dots, but also towards that thing, which consistently peered without forgetting about Garnet.

"....."

I stopped the sword that I had been plunging in for a while.

Two eyes that shed blood and tears looked at the single eye in the hole, also shedding blood and tears.

"...Now I'm the one who peers."

The box, as if screaming, shook unceasingly.

I drove the blood-woven blade even deeper into the gap in order to engrave the pain until the end.

'clang'

As the knife burrowed into a deeper place in the box, I felt it get caught on something. With all my might, I excruciatingly pulled the blade upwards, cutting it apart.



Everything, from the flesh inside the box to the safe-like body, was sliced clean. The stream of blood that rose to the ceiling fell like a broken hope that couldn't find a place to rest. The rain of red blanketed its body just as blood covered mine.

Without me noticing, the lab was already painted red.

The cold laboratory and machinery were stained with blood that could have belonged to anyone, and corpses, each telling its own story, lay strewn about in disarray.

Once warm, the blood cooled down, giving off a metallic stench.

Yes, if there is a hell, it would look like this. The scenery I've always seen is like this, too.

'click, click...'

By the time I forgot myself in the stillness of the hell before me, I began to hear mechanical noises coming from a speaker somewhere in the lab.

And then a familiar voice leaked out.

It was Lan Yen's.

I already knew what he was going to say. This moment also occurred in one of the innumerable despairs I experienced in the dots. But I couldn't stay calm. My mind was perpetually darkened.

"\*cough\* Can you hear me, boss? If he was right, this should be the frequency. I think it's working... I have to tell you this..."

Lan Yen's breathing was coarse...

"Boss, the Office... has been attacked."

He was talking with difficulty as if throwing up blood over his voice. There exists no device or means to transmit speech from this side. I have no choice but to listen to the words coming one-sidedly from the cold speaker.

"That picture we all saw together... The location of that laboratory... was in N Corp... Their taboo hunters came here... They rummaged through the Office... killed everyone..."

Due to my experiences in the dots, I had already put together several pieces of the puzzle in my head.

The Ring's laboratory, which could only be reached through the corridor, was somewhere within N Corp, and the footage of their Nest, where filming is taboo, found its way into our Office.

"However, I thought an Office of our grade would be able to negotiate with the taboo hunters before their dispatch... I guess the contents of that tape were a taboo of quite a high level..."

And since the film contained something absolutely unpardonable, we who saw the footage were observed and identified in turn.

Once N Corp's taboo hunters begin their pursuit, they will retrieve the footage after disposing of everyone who has seen it. This must have been the reason why Gubo, who works for N Corp, was at the Ring's auction house. Through the auction, he would go to the laboratory built somewhere in N Corp, hidden by the Ring with the corridor, identify its location, and retrieve their researcher.

"....."

The fact that N Corp's taboo hunters invaded our Office, located in V Corp's Nest, also meant that the two Wings had already finished the necessary agreements and approvals. One day, I met with the group called the Elders of V Corp. They visited me under the guise of greetings and having a meal with me, and they spoke with the edges of their mouths stretched to their fullest.

'Contact us whenever you need it! Haha'

'We'll always be on your side, Mr. Vergilius, understand?'

Weightless, empty words. They weighed the scales between N Corp and I, and N Corp was simply heavier. Their tedious lip service didn't impact the weighing scales at all.

"Well, boss, I'm sure you can negotiate with N Corp's golden horses, so I'm not worried about that, but Rikako, Nanseul, and Denver... Please take good care of them."

Through the speakers, I could faintly hear the sound of someone walking from behind the door of the room where Lan Yen was.

"And, my special bonus... please pass it... to those three... when they grow up..."

Contact was lost with the roar of something being broken. No more words were left behind by Lan Yen. Only silence remained again.

In the end, what I felt was no different from the emotions I endlessly experienced in Jumsoon's dots.

But compared to the myriad despairs, this was no different from the pain of a paper cut.

So it shouldn't have hurt anymore, but the knife pierced the abscessed wound again before the calluses could form. I pressed down on the blood that was flowing out and endured it.

No, am I truly enduring it?

I may have already shed all the blood inside me and met my end.





After cutting that thing down, a small safe-like box had been left in front of me. I stood before the unmoving box and quietly stared down at it.

What kind of monster doesn't die or disappear but leaves behind something like this?

I left the box there and began to take the next step.

Now that I've lost everything, I have to leave this place, cut everything down in my path, and go to where I need to go.

Because this City needs to be punished.

How ironic.

Now that I've lost everything, that man who suffered the same came to mind.

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'Hey, you're still living the simple life? You've got a Color, so why not try doing something that brings a little more money?'

'...It seems marriage was worth it.'

'Huhu, does it look that way?'

'Your blade looks duller than when we first met. And now you have that odd laughter mixed in, it's quite unpleasant.'

'Hmm... I guess it's obvious. Truth is, even back when I wore my mask in front of you, I felt like you could see through me. That pressure in your eyes still hasn't changed. If someone heard this, they'd think we've met often. We've only worked together during the Blood-red Night case, right? Well, that incident did drag on for way too long.'

Despite calling my gaze a 'pressure', he was one of the few people that would casually directly look me in the eye. That man, previously so busy with hiding behind a mask and suppressing himself, now had become so sly he could show his face and talk freely and at length by himself.

'Why are you living in District 9 when you could have gone to another Nest?'

'...Well, the Nests we hoped to enter rejected us, but my wife likes it here, so...'

In many cases, Fixers who have reached a certain grade are denied migration to Nests based on past requests, performance, or contracts. Conversely, this means that others are more eager to let high-grade Fixers into their Nests.

'You know how it is. If you set your mind to it, you can enter a Nest, but... it's really important which Nest you get into, and even there you have to find a good location, then a house with the options you like, so you can't move in that easily. Plus, you have to consider the price of the house, which has been going up, and the schools in the area, as they'll become



important later on. So, that's why people say that once you enter a Nest, it's hard to move out without a special reason."

'You have a lot to say about it, as much as you desire it.'

'Yeah, I'm a little greedy. So, what's your desire? People who've risen to a certain status always want at least one thing 'cause that's how they crawled their way up.'

Those who wanted to rise above this City had to do everything in their power. It takes a desire that shields one against vice to climb up this cliff, as one wrong step would likely result in a fall.

'...Didn't you say this was your last job?'

'Yep, and it's almost time we get going. Come to think of it, it's pretty crazy that I'm going to do my last job with you.'

'It wouldn't hurt to tell you at this occasion then. I...'

Unwittingly, I lightly spoke out the desires and world I had pictured in my mind. At our first meeting, he seemed to abhor everything he saw, such that he would bow his head and hide his face from the world... It was as if he was trying to bear the sins of the City. Was that why I thought he had what it took to understand my world?

'...Seriously?'

'Yes.'

'That's unexpected. I don't understand why everyone who gets a color ends up having a screw loose, without exception.'

'...Forget it. You'd just think of it as an insincere joke either way.'

'Well, yeah, but considering it's you, it might not be impossible...!'

A long pause of silence.

'But don't take everything so seriously. That's that, and this is this.'

I looked at him quietly, smiling.

'...I can't say I know you well, but I don't think those words suit you.'

I see, you were exhausted as well. Or rather... Did your initiative reach its end there? Not wanting to use my eyes any further, I stopped them again, and we executed our request.

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How long has it been since that day? The City had become brimmed with light and darkness for quite some time.

The sound of a piano had also echoed far and wide for a while.



By the time I myself realized it, something was already speaking to me in my darkened room.

'Red Gaze, were you involved in this incident?'

His voice, which I hadn't heard in a long time, held spiteful malice and murderous intentions... Together with it came a foul stench of blood. I did not notice such a dark presence because of the intense patience of the intruder, who was capable of perfectly concealing it all in the shadows.

'Black Silence... You didn't ask for permission, as usual.'

I felt as if I could see tear-filled eyes beyond his mask.

'I've been informed of what happened, and I feel sorry for it. But I'm also curious as to why you believe I was involved in that.'

'...You feel sorry? Quit it with this worthless speech.'

My sympathetic feelings were genuine.

But it is also true that my words had no worth. There are no words of comfort in this world that I can offer to this person. Grief and sorrow are his to bear, and nothing can replace them.

The same applies to me.

As such, there is nothing either of us can do about it. Any words we'll exchange hereafter will not be words meant to touch the heart. Now this one, depending on what I say, will try to murder me immediately, and when he does, I must do my best to defend myself and slay him in turn. I must consider all such possibilities and choose my words and actions carefully as if I had a starved, ravenous beast in front of me.

'Red Gaze, you once told me about the world you desired...'

'It's because of that conversation we've had in the past that I'll point out that you've got it completely wrong.'

That slip of the tongue. Was he able to understand the wish laden in those words?

'That was nothing more than a dream I once had. I can't even begin to put it into practice... It's merely an ideal.'

I looked into the eyes that were hidden somewhere behind the mask.

Some time passed, and in time, a deeply hoarse voice arose.

'You'd better be telling the truth.'

The black-masked someone calmly opened the door and left, disappearing into the darkness and quiet, never to be seen again.

The words I was unable to speak out, mixed together with the still stirring bloodlust in the air, whirled around in my throat.

'...If such a world really came to pass, even you as you are now would be at peace.'

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The silence of that time, which appeared as if an uninvited guest, raised a valid point. The time to create such a world has arrived.

**\*sheeen\***

From here, I could hear only a low sound coming from the laboratory. It came from the test tubes that contained the orphanage's children.

Most of the tubes were forced open, and the children that changed due to the glass window were lying dead on the floor. However, a single test tube remained closed, and now, it was slowly opening.

".....!"

I saw a face I thought I would never see again.  
The face, quietly and expressionlessly looking at me, was that of Lapis.  
I ran straight to Lapis.

"Lapis."

She had no external wounds. However, she didn't reply, for her pupils no longer looked at the light, like in the past. Her eyes, no longer bound to the wheel of time, saw a different world beyond this one...

"Lapis? I'm not Lapis. My name, Charon."

The Ring's glass window experiment was successful.  
With the success of Jumsoon's experiment, Lapis no longer exists. Expelled and overwritten by 'Charon', Lapis is effectively dead.

The light that I thought was a lighthouse was merely a shadow on the water, and there was no island after all.

"....."

Thus I decided to turn my back on the child in front of me. It would only dig up more of my wounds, so I had to sever our connection before it was built. This is both for my and 'Charon's sake.

I approached the various administrative and recording devices installed in the chamber where Gubo and Nanseul were. I had to print out and organize all the technical documents about the Ring's research. I had to use everything available, so I paid no mind to whose and how much blood stained this data. The only thing that mattered was whether it was valuable or not.

The strange child in the shape of Lapis walked to my location.

"Charon, hungry."

"....."

Without a reply, I kept collecting documents. The child, without any reaction in particular, walked to another spot.

These papers hold some high-value information. Companies and Fixers who would make good deals came to mind. At this rate, I should be able to attain the power needed to take the first step.

The moment I thought so, the corpses of Rikako and Nanseul entered the edges of my gaze.

I stopped what I was doing and moved to Rikako's front. His eyes, fallen and back-stabbed, looked at shadows. I closed his eyes. Then I took off my coat and covered Nanseul's minced body.

And before I realized it, Lapis... no, Charon was observing me.

"What are you doing?"

"....."

"Charon found this shiny thing. It's warm."



Charon reached out her hand. It was a hand with no alertness or fear. Suddenly, the pit of my stomach began to hurt again. The pain that pierced my back, caused by that very same hand, in one of the many alternate worlds felt more bearable than this.

"This is..."

In Charon's hand was a red jewel. The jewel Garnet was cocooned in. But that was broken and shattered by those saw blades, losing its light and warmth. Yet the piece Charon held was shining as if crying. Among the numerous tiny fragments, this was the only one that shined.

I was about to grab the piece Charon held out, but she withdrew her hand again.

"Charon found it in that pile, so it's Charon's. I like it, it's warm."



I painfully suppressed the emotions that seemed to be squeezing my throat.

"Charon is curious about the name of this shiny. Do you know?"

"...Garnet. A jewel that shines red."

In the end, my heart which didn't wish to exchange words slowly melted down before this child who had picked up a star in the night.

Why does this thing called a heart not work as I wish it to?

'\*boom\*'

Together with the sound of an explosion, one of the lab's doors is blown open.

They looked quite different from N Corp's taboo hunters. Actually, it doesn't matter what or who they are. I seized the handle of my gladius once more.

"LCA Special Operations Team completed entry into operational position. 'Red' has been found. The area is now surrounded by the second camp."

An unfamiliar name was heard, but that didn't matter to me. They were probably just one of the obstacles on the road that I would have to cut down anyway... With that thought in mind, I was about to put some strength into the hand holding my sword, when...

"No, there's no need to shed blood anymore."

Someone walked out from the middle of the armed group.

A person with hair that seemed white from a distance but grayish up close stood before me. She showed no agitation or nervousness toward my sword-wielding appearance. Rather than calm, she seems to simply be fatigued by everything, a familiar feeling.  
...Boredom.



"I am Faust of the Limbus Company."

This is the first time I've heard of such a company. But since this is a company, they must have raided this lab for its technology.

"I know what you want and I can help you achieve it."

I regarded it as nothing more than the lip service of an employee, a truly worthless statement.

"Lapis and Garnet, we can give those two back to you."

"....."

I motionlessly stared at her words.  
I felt my eyes tremble for a moment.

I planned to walk the path on my lonesome.  
But the red light shining from a jewel shattered to pieces,  
The warmth of that light offered to me by a child, both familiar yet different,  
That single sentence from a stranger which compelled me to turn my head, if only faintly, to the light,  
And a faded promise from the past...

They seized me, stopping me in my tracks.

"How about it, Red Gaze? Would you like to work with Limbus Company?"

I closed my eyes.

"...Let's hear what you have to say."

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Translated by @SnakeskinFS  
Reviewed by @kygi1232 or luho#2697